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Central Intelligence Agency

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**Nicaragua: Assessment of Insurgent
and Regime Capabilities in
Third Quarter 1988**

24 October 1988

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: FEB 2003

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
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Nicaragua: Assessment of Insurgent and Regime Capabilities
in Third Quarter 1988

Summary

While combat activity remained at a low level, ill-equipped insurgent troops and supporters continued to stream into Honduras during the past three months, causing guerrilla military capabilities to wane further and command and control of forces inside Nicaragua to deteriorate. Guerrilla political cohesion also suffered in the wake of divisive elections for leadership positions in July. The Sandinistas, meanwhile, initiated large-scale counter-insurgency operations in south-central and northwest Nicaragua. They also cracked down on the internal opposition, which, despite some activity in mid-summer, remained largely cowed by regime pressure. [redacted]

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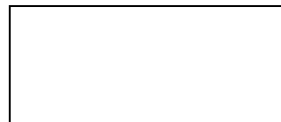
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Insurgent Capabilities Hit Bottom

Resupply and logistics problems continued to drive insurgents out of Nicaragua this quarter. [redacted] despite an effort to reinfiltrate some fighters approximately 2,000 additional rebels and several hundred supporters had left Nicaragua by the end of September, bringing the total number of combatants in Honduras to over 12,000. The exodus included elite insurgent units that reportedly had remained active by relying on the local populace and captured Sandinista supplies after aerial resupply ended last winter. [redacted]

[redacted] insurgent military chief Enrique Bermudez was visibly shaken by the dismal condition of the troops exfiltrating. [redacted]

The already poor supply situation worsened and Tegucigalpa remained reluctant to release guerrilla munitions under its control. Honduran military chief Regalado told US Embassy officials on 26 July that he feared the insurgents would pose an internal security threat to Honduras if US support ends. Regalado apparently ignored a formal request from Bermudez on 31 August to release the munitions. In his request, Bermudez claimed that guerrillas in Honduras had only four million rounds of AK-47 ammunition on hand and no reserves or caches inside Nicaragua. [redacted] individual regional commanders in sanctuary in September confirmed Bermudez's statements. [redacted]

We believe ammunition and tactical communications capabilities inside Nicaragua dwindled to the point of permitting only limited defensive actions by individual insurgent units. Reporting showed only about 12 clashes per week in Nicaragua during the quarter, despite renewed operations by the Sandinistas. [redacted]

The exfiltration of insurgents also undermined insurgent general staff command and control over guerrillas in sanctuary and in the field. Bermudez said in early August that command and control inside Nicaragua had completely broken down and that coordination of combat operations was no longer possible, [redacted]

[redacted] there appeared to be a general lack of direction and purpose in the strategic command at Yamales, with many general staff members absent for a variety of reasons. Although a formal daily training schedule and other organized activities continued, little in the way of combat preparation appeared underway. [redacted]

Reports that Sandinista infiltrators entered Honduras with retreating guerrillas and supporters suggest that insurgent intelligence and security capabilities also continued to decline during the quarter. [redacted] a group of

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Cuban-trained Sandinista officers have penetrated insurgent ranks in Honduras since at least 1985, collected operational intelligence, and conducted sabotage aimed at discrediting the insurgent cause. []

Insurgent Political Infighting

Guerrilla internal dissension intensified this quarter after a new political Directorate was elected in July. Four newcomers--including military commander Enrique Bermudez--joined incumbents Adolfo Calero, Alfredo Cesar, and Aristides Sanchez on the board. The blatant manipulation of the election, including vote buying and the padding of delegations, sparked a vehement reaction from guerrilla politicians who threatened to leave the movement. The election of Bermudez also prompted insurgents from the southern front, long critical of his leadership, to secede from the movement. Calero denounced the military chief as untrustworthy and observed that his elevation to a high political post would create a serious public relations problem. []

By late August, moderate politicians critical of the new Directorate formed a new coalition and threatened to secede. The group, spearheaded by Cesar, demanded more equitable distribution of funds and a greater voice in decisionmaking on cease-fire strategy. Some members also were concerned with polishing their image in anticipation of a new US administration. [] Cesar, Robelo, and former director Pedro Joaquin Chamorro believed that any new US administration would want to distance itself from the "old" insurgent movement. []

While new funding procedures and cease-fire talks in September defused such talk, we expect infighting to continue and further splits in the movement are possible. [] by the end of the quarter the loose coalition had formally created a new organization and stated its intention to continue pressing demands for internal reform. []

Sandinistas Launch Aggressive Operations

The Sandinistas proved increasingly aggressive in the field during the quarter as they sought to fill the void in the countryside left by departing insurgents. Multibattalion operations in south-central Nicaragua secured the area around Juigalpa for the 19 July anniversary celebration of the revolution. Large-scale counterinsurgency and counterintelligence operations aimed at driving insurgents into Honduras and blocking reinfiltration in northwestern and north-central Nicaragua have continued since mid-July. The Sandinistas apparently hoped to disguise the scope of these operations--which in the north involved up to 1,500 counterinsurgency forces and 2,500 other troops--by not using close air and long-range artillery support. []

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As the guerrillas exfiltrated to Honduras, government military and intelligence units attempted to mop up remaining pockets of insurgents and dismantle their support network. According to the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa, some insurgents claimed the Sandinistas were carrying out night attacks against guerrilla units inside Nicaragua and intimidating suspected civilian collaborators. [redacted]

[redacted] the Sandinistas arrested hundreds of campesinos in the Jinotega-Matagalpa area on charges of supporting the insurgents. [redacted]

The Sandinistas also used an extensive civic-action program to shore up their own local support, especially in the south. The Embassy reported the regime was giving peasants better medical and dental care, some scarce consumer goods, agricultural supplies, and low-cost loans. Managua also worked to improve roads to key markets and, in an unprecedented move, announced plans to suspend the military draft in the south until the end of the year. [redacted]

Tightening the Noose

Beginning in July the Sandinistas also moved to stifle the internal opposition with a crackdown on its leaders and the expulsion of US diplomats accused of conspiring with them. On 10 July, government forces broke up an opposition rally in the southern town of Nandaimé and arrested some 40 anti-Sandinista politicians who were still on trial at the end of September. The regime also closed several independent news outlets for short periods, confiscated a number of private properties, and repeatedly refused to issue permits for opposition marches and rallies. In September, the editor of an opposition newspaper was brutally attacked by assailants who sources [redacted] believe were officially sanctioned thugs. [redacted]

The crackdown successfully cowed regime opponents. The main opposition coalition canceled plans for a major rally in September because of insufficient funds and government intimidation, [redacted]

Even the Catholic Church stepped back from direct confrontation. In August, Cardinal Obando y Bravo accepted the Sandinista offer to reopen Radio Católica without newscasts, [redacted]. Obando may have taken his cue in part from the Pope, who was less critical of the Sandinistas when he met with the Cardinal in August than he had been earlier in the year. [redacted]

The Anti-Sandinista Insurgency Key Indicators

Legend ○ Deficient ● Substantial
 ○ Weak ● Strong
 ○ Moderate

High } Level of confidence
Med } in judgment
Low }

Military Capabilities		Quarters	1986	1987				1988			
			IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II ^a	III ^a	
1	Presence in country		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
2	Geographic extent of operations		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
3	Command, control, and complexity of operations		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
4	Intelligence and security		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
5	Military initiative		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
6	Combat proficiency		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Low
7	Troop morale and discipline		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Low
8	Availability of weapons/ammunition/equipment		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
9	Logistic support		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
Political Capabilities											
10	Leadership quality and charisma		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
11	Cohesion and unity		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
12	Appeal of movement inside Nicaragua		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
13	Development and expression of political program		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
14	Cooperation of rural population		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Low
15	Urban support		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
16	Cooperation by Central American states		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
17	Foreign support and recognition		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High

^a Evaluation of most indicators of military capabilities during these quarters is approximate because the cease-fire kept combat activity low.

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The Sandinista Regime Key Indicators

Legend

○ Deficient
○ Weak
○ Moderate

● Substantial
● Strong

High
Med
Low } Level of confidence
in judgment

Military Capabilities		Quarters	1986	1987				1988				
			IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II ^a	III ^a		
1	Command and control		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
2	Strategy and tactics		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
3	Intelligence and security		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
4	Military aggressiveness		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
5	Mobility/Presence in countryside		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
6	Combat effectiveness		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
7	Recruitment and retention		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
8	Availability of weapons and equipment		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
9	Logistic support		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
10	Ability to assimilate equipment and operate without foreign advisors		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
Political Capabilities												
11	Directorate unity and cohesion		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
12	Civilian/military relations		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
13	Internal security		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
14	Political institutions		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Low	
15	Ability to mobilize mass support		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
16	Control of political opposition		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
17	Ability to defuse religious/ethnic discontent		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	
18	Ability to deflect dissatisfaction with economic performance		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High	
19	Foreign political/diplomatic support		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med	

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